

Tamil Studies at SOAS University of London



Questions worth asking

SOAS University of London has launched its first major fundraising campaign: Questions worth asking.

As a proudly international institution with a unique global outlook, SOAS asks searching questions about human challenges facing not just Asia, Africa and the Middle East, but the entire world. Because of its global perspective, SOAS asks questions no-one else is asking. Questions worth asking. Its academic expertise and diversity allow SOAS to give answers no-one else can provide.

The Campaign for SOAS has already raised around £50 million through the generous support of alumni, friends, trusts, foundations, staff and students.

The priority funding areas for Questions worth asking are: Scholarships and Student Experience, Academic Projects, and Transforming the SOAS estate.

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"For over a century, SOAS has pioneered the study of the world from a global perspective. With a focus on languages and cultures, it has developed new fields and academic disciplines, bringing fresh insight and understanding to education. We all need to support SOAS in its journey to the next 100 years."

Graça Machel, President of SOAS

Introduction

SOAS University of London is the world's leading institution for the study of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. For over 100 years, it has promoted the academic study of the languages, cultures, religions and societies of these regions, and gained an unparalleled reputation as an indispensable interpreter in a complex world. As such, SOAS is ideally placed to provide a home for Tamil Studies.

SOAS's 300 academic staff comprise the largest concentration of specialist staff concerned with the study of Africa, Asia and the Middle East at any university in the world. With over 6,300 students from over 130 countries on campus and a further 3,200 students around the world on distance learning programmes, we are one of the most international and multicultural universities in the world.

This document illustrates SOAS's history in the teaching and research of Tamil Studies. It also shows that despite this long association, its continued prominence is at risk due to financial pressures, especially for subjects with lower student numbers.

We are seeking support to enable Tamil Studies to once again take its place globally at SOAS, alongside the study of other great regional traditions of scholarship for which the school is renowned.

Background

Located in the heart of London, SOAS is the leading institution focusing on the study of the languages, cultures and societies of Africa, Asia, and the Near and Middle East. It is at the centre of thought leadership on its regions of expertise and a place of vibrant debate, where diverse views are heard and new ideas formed.

Languages are core to the SOAS mission. The School's research is concerned with language in all its forms, from text to image, the spoken word, music, and performance. SOAS promotes a diversity of languages and voices, and enables them to be heard nationally and internationally. We believe a safe and prosperous world can only be achieved through mutual respect and understanding for each other's languages.

SOAS has an unrivalled specialism in languages of strategic importance and in which the provision of teaching is vulnerable—indeed there are 13 languages, which are only taught at SOAS in the UK: Bengali, Burmese, Hausa, Hokkien, Indonesian, Khmer, Nepali, Somali, Swahili, Vietnamese, Yoruba, and Zulu.

The study of language gives unique access to the culture of a region, to its contemporary life and its historical civilization. Starting from this premise, SOAS's Department of the Languages and Cultures of South Asia is devoted to the research and teaching of the languages and literatures of the Indian subcontinent, with Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, Punjabi, Sanskrit, and Urdu all being offered to students either as part of their degree programmes or as stand-alone courses.

Tamil Studies at SOAS

Tamil was an integral part of SOAS's language offering for many years, particularly during the time of renowned scholars Dr John Marr and Dr Stuart Blackburn. Their significant contributions to Tamil Studies have hugely enriched SOAS's history of engagement with Tamil Studies: Dr Marr's *An Introduction to colloquial Tamil* is still considered as one of the leading resources for the study of the language, and Dr Blackburn's research and publications added greatly to the understanding of Tamil oral tradition.

Several of our academics focus on aspects of Tamil culture and society—Professor David Mosse's seminal work on caste and Christianity in South India, Dr Stephen Hughes's work on Tamil performing arts, Dr Crispin Branfoot's research on the South Indian temple, art and architecture, and Dr Suthaharan Nadarajah's influential research on the Sri Lankan peace process, diaspora, and international relations. However, philanthropic support is needed to ensure that SOAS can bring these together within a broader Tamil Studies framework and resume teaching Tamil language.

The breadth and depth of SOAS's expertise on South Asia makes it the perfect home for Tamil Studies. SOAS is home to the South Asia Institute which represents the most extensive and diverse community of scholars working on the region of any university in Europe. With over 65 academics covering a wide range of topics related to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives, the Institute has established itself as an internationally renowned centre for multidisciplinary research and training, offering specialist degree programmes and expert analysis, as well as forging important partnerships with academic institutions in the region.

The SOAS Library boasts over 150,000 resources on the region, in European and South Asian languages. It has amassed one of the most substantial open collections of Tamil published books and manuscripts in the UK, second only to the British Library.

Its location in the heart of London also makes SOAS the ideal home for this initiative. London has one of the most substantial Tamil-diaspora populations globally as well as a wealth of cultural, intellectual and humanitarian institutions such as Asia House, The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, The Nehru Centre and the Tamil branch of the BBC, which would all benefit from the development of the Tamil presence at SOAS. London is also host to twelve weekend Tamil Schools, with many volunteer teachers offering basic and intermediate instruction to students up to the age of 18, which would also directly benefit from an advanced Tamil Studies programme within London.

SOAS is home of the beloved statue of the famous Tamil poet Thiruvalluvar, whose presence has illuminated the SOAS campus for over 20 years. The SOAS Students Union hosts an active Tamil Society which organises a varied programme of events for anyone interested in Tamil culture and issues.

Philanthropic Options

Endowed senior position in Tamil Studies

Our ambition is to secure endowment funding for a senior academic position in Tamil Studies. This position would further research, teaching, and debate on the history, language, and culture of the Tamil people. A Chair in Tamil Studies at SOAS would attract an internationally renowned academic with the required profile and experience to expand and promote the field within SOAS, the UK, and around the world. Their key responsibilities would be to:

- renew and build strong links with Tamil communities in the UK and internationally
- teach undergraduate and postgraduate courses on Tamil society, culture, and literature
- supervise PhD students
- produce cutting edge research
- encourage more students to focus on the field

The best way of providing sustained leadership in Tamil Studies is through the endowment of a Chair held by either a Professor or Senior Lecturer/Reader. The total investment required to establish an endowment and fund the Chair in perpetuity is £6 million.

Language Teaching

Language teaching is in an exciting period of innovation. SOAS has plans for a Senior Teaching Fellow to teach Tamil language and help make and strengthen internal and external connections within the Tamil and Tamil Studies communities.

Scholarships

We would also like to establish postgraduate (both at Master's and PhD level) scholarships for talented students who might otherwise not be able to study at SOAS.

Education has never been more important in our radically changing world. But in the current economic climate it is difficult for some students to make this investment in their future. London is one of the most expensive cities in the world, and tuition fees can deter talented candidates from taking up their place.

At SOAS we believe that people who have the linguistic, cultural, and analytical skills to transcend political borders and make an impact are true global citizens. We know that SOAS graduates and scholars master these skills.

By supporting scholarships for Tamil Studies, this will attract more people towards its study, helping build a sustainable cohort of students for the future, and at postgraduate level will help develop the academics, teachers and researchers of tomorrow.

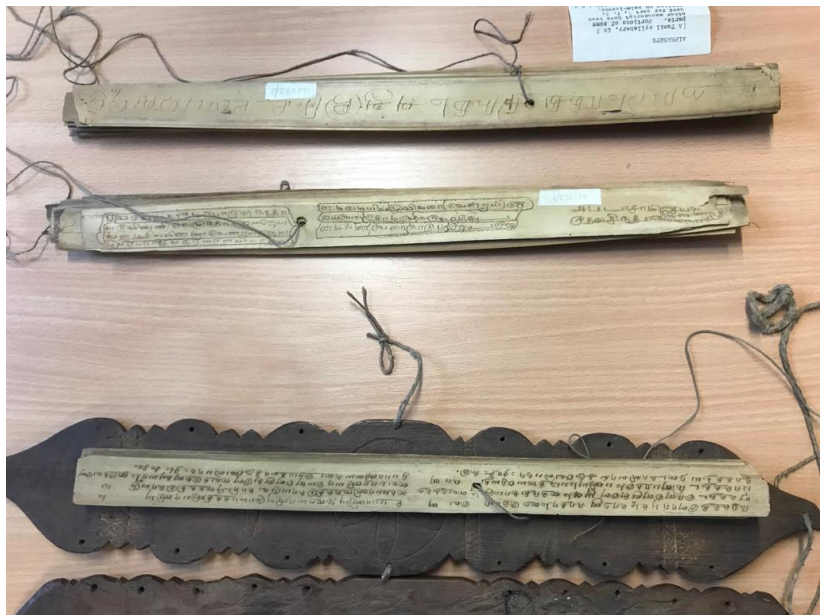
Scholarships also make a real difference to the lives of the scholars themselves. A Scholarship is not a gift that stops on graduation day; education can transform lives, communities, and even nations.

Preserving Tamil resources in the SOAS Library

We would like to ensure that the wealth of resources written in Tamil and about Tamil Studies in the SOAS Library are properly preserved for the study and appreciation of future generations. Projects range from the digitalization and conservation of existing items in our collections so that these are available to read online, to the accurate cataloguing and storage of newly acquired and fragile pieces.

By modernizing the access to resources on Tamil Studies in the SOAS Library, people from all around the world will be able to view these rare and important materials. This will have an enormous impact in raising the profile of the subject internationally and ensuring that these historically important documents continue to be studied far into the future.

The exact details of these projects are variable and dependent on level of intended investment and desired impact.



Dr G Gnannasambantham's visit to see the Tamil Manuscripts in the SOAS Special Collections – January 2019

Thiruvalluvar at SOAS

In 1996 the Tamil Nadu Government generously gifted the statue of Thiruvalluvar which prominently sits on our campus and has become a part of the School's identity.

Tamil Studies has found a natural home at SOAS. The School has hosted multiple events showcasing music, dance, poetry and academic talks with the Tamil community and Tamil Chair UK (a not-for-profit with the aim to set up a Tamil Chair at the SOAS), many of which are focussed around the Thiruvalluvar Statue. The most recent being Pongal and Thiruvalluvar Day where guests from the Indian High Commission, community leaders and SOAS staff and student body gathered to mark this occasion with music and recitations of Thirukkural.



Pongal 2019

SOAS South Asia Institute welcomed members of Tamil Chair UK, the SOAS Tamil Society and A.S Rajan, Minister of Coordination from the High Commission of India to SOAS to mark the Harvest Festival of Pongal and Thiruvalluvar Day on Wednesday the 16th of January 2019. They were joined by SOAS Staff, senior academics and community leaders from across London for an evening of Thirukkural recitations, speeches and music followed by an honouring ceremony.

Financial Details

Figures are indicative estimates based on the 2019/20 Academic year costs.

Scholarships	UK/EU Fees only Scholarship	UK/EU Full Scholarship	International Fees only Scholarship	International Full Scholarship
PhD	£18,000	£90,000	£72,000	£144,000
Master's	£12,000	£30,000	£20,000	£38,000

Estimated Costs	
£100,000	2-year fixed term Tamil language lector to deliver language teaching
£ 4 million (INR 40 Crore)	Endowed Tamil Studies Scholarships
£ 6 million (INR 60 Crore)	Chair in Tamil studies
£ 10 million (INR 100 Crore)	Establish Tamil Studies Centre at SOAS

Conclusion

SOAS is extremely proud of its longstanding history of the research and teaching of Tamil Studies and the Tamil language.

SOAS helps the world to keep talking. Understanding a region's languages is essential for understanding its politics, society, religion, and culture. Through teaching and learning languages, SOAS asks questions to address issues of advancement, prosperity, security and cohesion. We can only continue our mission with support from visionary philanthropists.

We would be very grateful for your consideration of this proposal to ensure that we can provide the level of expertise in Tamil Studies that we aspire to, and to support the future of Tamil language teaching at SOAS.

Contact Details

We would be delighted to discuss any area of our proposal, and to answer any questions you may have about the role of the senior position in Tamil Studies, the language Lector, or any aspects of SOAS work on the Tamil language or other related areas.

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Indian High Commission, Mayor of Camden and staff of SOAS at the unveiling of the statue of Thiruvalluvar at SOAS—13th of May 1996

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